Level of Program Implementation and Pupil-Counselor Ratios within the Comprehensive Guidance Program in Utah Public Schools

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Introduction

Since its inception, Utah's Comprehensive Guidance Program has aimed to enable school counselors to eliminate non-guidance activities and increase direct services to students. Direct services include the elements of student planning, guidance curriculum, and responsive services.

Over the past several years, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) has made consistent efforts to help existing programs implement the Comprehensive Guidance model at higher levels. Previous studies have suggested that schools implement the Comprehensive Guidance model at high levels when the number of students per counselor (the pupil-counselor ratio) is at a manageable level. The *Utah Model for Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling* (USOE, 1998, p.9) recommends that schools have at least one counselor for every 400 students.

Previous studies have also demonstrated that, for Comprehensive Guidance programs, the level of program implementation is strongly linked to student outcome measures such as performance on the ACT, course-taking patterns, and student satisfaction with how the school prepared them to succeed beyond high school graduation.

The purpose of the current study was to better understand how the pupil-counselor ratio relates to the level of program implementation.

Previous Studies on Comprehensive Guidance in Utah

Summary of a 1995 Study

A study entitled *The Student Educational and Occupational Plan (SEOP) and Comprehensive Guidance in Utah Schools* (Kimball, Gardner, and Ellison, 1995) was conducted in 1995. At that time, 49 schools had qualified to receive funding to create and sustain Comprehensive Guidance programs. The study used surveys and interviews to assess how Comprehensive Guidance funding had affected those schools, especially their career-related services and resources (such as the SEOP).

Survey results indicated that many impressive efforts had been made to improve SEOP processes and other career-related activities as a result of implementation of the Comprehensive Guidance model at the schools. For instance, 74% of the schools indicated that parents and students review SEOP information together. Additionally, 100% of the schools had students complete or review SEOP plans in their 10th grade year. In approximately 90% of the schools, these plans were completed or reviewed each year from 7th to 12th grade.

Survey responses also indicated areas for improving the SEOP process. Although almost all schools sampled reported that more counselor time and resources had been devoted to SEOP activities as a result of the Comprehensive Guidance Program, the three most frequently mentioned obstacles to program success also involved resources — time, money, and pupil-counselor ratios. This pointed to the fact that counselor responsibilities were increasing and suggested that pupil-counselor ratios should be focused on as a leverage point for further improving the SEOP process.

Remaining obstacles mentioned by the respondents involved support from different participants, including involvement and support of school-level administrations, district-level support, and faculty commitment. To address these issues, the report suggested that district and school administrations should receive more information on the positive effects of Comprehensive Guidance and should be encouraged to fully support its implementation.

Summary of a 1998 Study

A two-part evaluation of the Comprehensive Guidance Program in Utah Public Schools was conducted in 1998. In Study I, entitled *The Implementation and Impact of the Comprehensive Guidance Program in Utah Public Schools* (Nelson and Gardner, 1998), surveys and interviews were conducted to determine how the program had been implemented throughout the state. Through this process, a "level of implementation" scale was developed to measure the extent to which schools had implemented the Comprehensive Guidance model. In Study II, entitled *Contrasts Between Students in High Implementation and Low Implementation High Schools in the Utah Comprehensive Guidance Program* (Nelson, Fox, and Gardner, 1998), the level of implementation scale was used to contrast high implementation Comprehensive Guidance schools with low implementation schools.

Study I. As part of Study I, a survey of Comprehensive Guidance Programs throughout the state of Utah was conducted in October and November of 1997. The survey was conducted to determine the impacts of more fully implemented Comprehensive Guidance Programs on the Student Education and Occupation Plan process and related indicators in Utah public schools.

Survey results indicated that Comprehensive Guidance had a major impact on many indicators in the participating schools. The most profound impacts were on the following areas: student planning, the extent of counseling and guidance services offered in schools, and coordination within schools. Comprehensive Guidance had also had a positive impact on parental involvement in schools, the job definition and productivity of school counselors, career exploration, information management, and the development and delivery of guidance curriculum.

Study I results also identified areas in which the Comprehensive Guidance Program could improve. In many schools, time management was a major obstacle to increasing program success. Also, funding posed a problem to many schools. These schools felt hampered by an ineffective flow of funds through districts and the lack of information about funding and budget

issues. At many schools, counselors, teachers, and principals felt that pupil-counselor ratios were too high and not enough support personnel existed to implement a highly successful Comprehensive Guidance Program.

Study II. The purpose of Study II was to determine what impact the level of implementation of Comprehensive Guidance in individual schools had on important descriptors of student success and other characteristics.

An analysis of the data revealed that students in high implementing schools: a) rated their overall educational preparation as more adequate, b) rated their job preparation as better, and c) rated guidance and career planning services in the schools as more effective.

In addition, students in high implementing schools: a) took more advanced mathematics and science courses, b) took more vocational and technical courses, and C) had higher ACT scores in every area of the test. Finally, fewer students in high implementing schools described their high school program as "general."

Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to assess how the pupil-counselor ratio affects schools' level of Comprehensive Guidance Program implementation. To achieve this purpose, all Utah public secondary schools that had qualified to receive Comprehensive Guidance funding before May 20, 1999 were invited to participate in the study. Each school received a survey to be completed by the counseling department. Of the 234 targeted schools, 193 responded, a participation rate exceeding 82 percent.

Survey Instruments

Survey forms were developed by a committee that included USOE and IBRIC personnel. To construct the survey, the committee reviewed the forms used in the evaluation of Comprehensive Guidance in 1998. The most critical items were retained and reworked for inclusion in the survey used for this study. The survey employed various scales. The scales asked respondents to indicate how accurately certain program descriptors fit the their schools and rate the extent of district-level support in various areas. Respondents were also asked to provide indications about student participation in individual planning and the management of counselor time. (See Appendix A — A Survey of Comprehensive Guidance Programs in Utah for the complete survey form.)

Procedure

IBRIC distributed survey forms to counselors at a statewide conference for Comprehensive Guidance held in August 1999. Schools that did not submit a completed survey at that time were sent a survey form in the mail; they were encouraged to complete it and mail it to IBRIC.

School codes, located on the survey forms, allowed IBRIC to link survey data to information obtained from USOE about enrollment, number of counselors, and the pupil-counselor ratio at each responding school.

Results

In the survey used for this study, school counselors were asked to indicate the accuracy of several statements describing various aspects of the Comprehensive Guidance Program at their schools. Complete survey results are provided in Appendix B — Survey Results. Survey results indicated that the level of Comprehensive Guidance implementation was linked to the number of pupils per counselor at a school. The correlation between the level of program implementation and the pupil-counselor ratio was .30, significant at the .01 level.

The 20 schools with the highest level of Comprehensive Guidance implementation had an average pupil-counselor ratio of 327. The 20 schools with the lowest level of implementation had an average ratio of 591, almost twice the number of students per counselor at the high implementing schools.

Low Versus High Ratio Schools in General

At the schools that responded to the survey, the average pupil-counselor ratio was 436. For Comprehensive Guidance, the recommended ratio is 400 students per counselor. To analyze the results from this study, the responding schools were put into two groups. One group, labeled Low Ratio, included all the schools that had a pupil-counselor ratio of 400 or lower. The other group, labeled High Ratio, included the schools that had a pupil-counselor ratio of 500 or higher. Of the 193 schools in the study, 92 (48%) were identified as Low Ratio and 50 (26%) as High Ratio.

Graph 1 illustrates some of the specific ways in which a low pupil-counselor ratio was positively related to Comprehensive Guidance Program implementation. When compared to High Ratio schools, Low Ratio schools were much more likely to report that their counseling department received sufficient funding to implement a highly successful Comprehensive Guidance Program and that sufficient time and resources were set aside to meet the requirements of the SEOP process. Counselors at Low Ratio schools were also much more likely to report that the time needed to manage the SEOP process did **not** infringe on the responsive services that counselors were able to provide to students.

A lower pupil-counselor ratio also had a strong association with student use of the school career center, the types of class schedules students follow, and student use of their educational and occupational portfolios and plans. Low Ratio schools were much more likely to report that

the Comprehensive Guidance Program has led to more students building their school schedules around their career goals. Low Ratio schools make more active efforts (phone calls and special schedule arrangements) to assure that parents can attend their children's SEOP conferences. And, counselors at Low Ratio schools devote more time working directly with students and have more time to provide students with responsive services.

Graph 2 shows that, when compared to High Ratio schools, more Low Ratio schools reported that the amount of time dedicated to responsive services has increased dramatically over the past several years. Low Ratio schools were also much more likely to report that over the past several years the amount of counselor time devoted to working directly with students has increased dramatically. This is a telling piece of data since one of the main goals of Comprehensive Guidance is to enable counselors to work more directly with students as opposed to working as registration clerks.

Middle Schools and High Schools

The pupil-counselor ratio at a school appears to have a slightly different impact on Comprehensive Guidance Program implementation at middle schools compared to high schools.

The Pupil-Counselor Ratio at Middle Schools. At middle schools, a low pupil-counselor ratio was likely to have a strong effect on students' schedules in two ways. Students at such schools were more likely to take Applied Technology Education classes. They were also more likely to enroll in higher level math, science, and writing classes. Such schools were also better able to schedule SEOP conferences with parents, making accommodations to meet parents' schedules when necessary. Middle schools with lower pupil-counselor ratios also were more likely to report that their districts provided extensive support in supplying needed resources and the development of guidance curriculum. See Graphs 3 and 4 for more specific data in these areas.

The Pupil-Counselor Ratio at High Schools. At high schools, a lower pupil-counselor ratio had a slightly different effect. At high schools, a lower pupil-counselor ratio was much more likely to be positively related to the time that counselors were able to dedicate to responsive services. Counselors at such schools were also more likely to report that all teachers at their schools receive inservice on the SEOP process. At Low Ratio high schools, all students were more likely to visit the career center at least once during the year, the school administrations were more helpful in creating and supporting school goals related to the SEOP process, and career guidance software programs were more accessible throughout the school (regular classrooms, labs, the career center, etc.). Also, Low Ratio high schools were much more likely to report that 95-100% of their students completed a formalized SEOP. See Graphs 5, 6, and 7 for more specific data in these areas.

School Size

The impact of the pupil-counselor ratio at schools with Comprehensive Guidance Programs also differs depending on the size of the school as measured by student enrollment. For high schools, the pupil-counselor ratio appeared to have a more significant effect on program implementation at smaller schools. For middle schools, the ratio appeared to have much more of an impact at larger schools.

High Schools. The 90 high schools that participated in this study were divided into three groups based on their student enrollment. High schools were classified as small-size (n=30) if they had less than 500 students enrolled, mid-size (n=30) if their enrollment was between 500 and 1,500, and large-size (n=30) if their enrollment exceeded 1,500.

In high schools, the pupil-counselor ratio exhibited a correlation of .22 with the level of Comprehensive Guidance implementation derived from the survey. That correlation is significant at the .05 level. For small-size schools, the correlation increased to .35, also significant at the .05 level. For mid-size (r = .17) and large-size (r = .22) schools, the correlation decreased. One explanation for this finding is that, compared to smaller high schools, larger high schools typically have more personnel who provide non-guidance support to counseling departments, thus decreasing the effect of a low pupil-counselor ratio in the larger schools.

Middle Schools. The 103 middle schools that participated in this study were divided into three groups based on their student enrollment. Middle schools were classified as small-size (n=35) if they had less than 600 students enrolled, mid-size (n=33) if their enrollment was between 600 and 1,000, and large-size (n=35) if their enrollment exceeded 1,000.

In middle schools, the pupil-counselor ratio exhibited a correlation of .33 with level of Comprehensive Guidance implementation. That correlation is significant at the .01 level. For large-size schools, the correlation increased (r = .43 - significant at the .01 level). For mid-size schools, the correlation also increased (r = .36 - significant at the .05 level). For small-size schools, the correlation decreased (r = .24). One explanation for this finding is that, compared to high schools, middle schools typically have fewer personnel available to provide non-guidance support to counseling departments. Consequently, larger enrollment in middle schools creates more management tasks that fall to counselors. (In high schools, support personnel would more likely complete those same management tasks.) This decreases the amount of time that counselors in larger middle schools have to provide direct services to students. As a result, the pupil-counselor ratio strongly affects large middle schools' ability to provide guidance and counseling services to students.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Conclusions

The results from this study indicate strongly that the pupil-counselor ratio at schools influences their ability to implement Comprehensive Guidance at high levels and, thus, to improve student performance. This strongly suggests that Utah public schools that have qualified for Comprehensive Guidance funding more successfully implement the model and achieve positive results when the pupil-counselor ratio at their schools is near the recommended level of 400 students per counselor.

The following are the most important specific conclusions from the study:

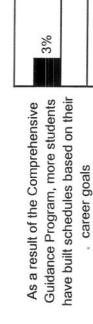
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the pupil-counselor ratio and the level of Comprehensive Guidance implementation in Utah secondary schools
- Secondary schools that were the *highest* implementers of Comprehensive Guidance had pupil-counselor ratios *below 400*
- Secondary schools that were the *lowest* implementers of Comprehensive Guidance had pupil-counselor ratios *over* 500
- Secondary schools with lower pupil-counselor ratios report that they can do a much more effective job of Student Education and Occupation Plans (SEOPs) a meaningful experience for students
- Secondary schools with lower pupil-counselor ratios report that they can do a better job of providing individual assistance (responsive services) to students

Recommendation

It is strongly recommended that the Utah State Board of Education, the Utah State Legislature, and school districts identify or create funding to enable *all* Utah secondary schools to reach the pupil-counselor ratio of 400. It is further recommended that adherence to the pupil-counselor ratio of 400 be a matter of State Board Policy or Utah State law and be mandated by USOE.

Graphs

GRAPH 1 -- Percentage of schools responding that the statement is EXTREMELY ACCURATE in describing their programs

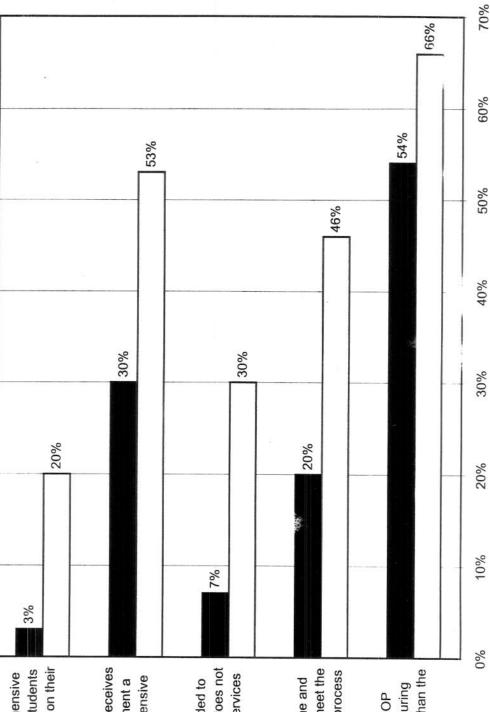


Our counseling department receives sufficient funding to implement a highly successful Comprehensive Guidance Program.

In our school, the time needed to manage the SEOP process does not infringe on the responsive services provided.

In our school, sufficient time and resources are set aside to meet the requirements of the SEOP process

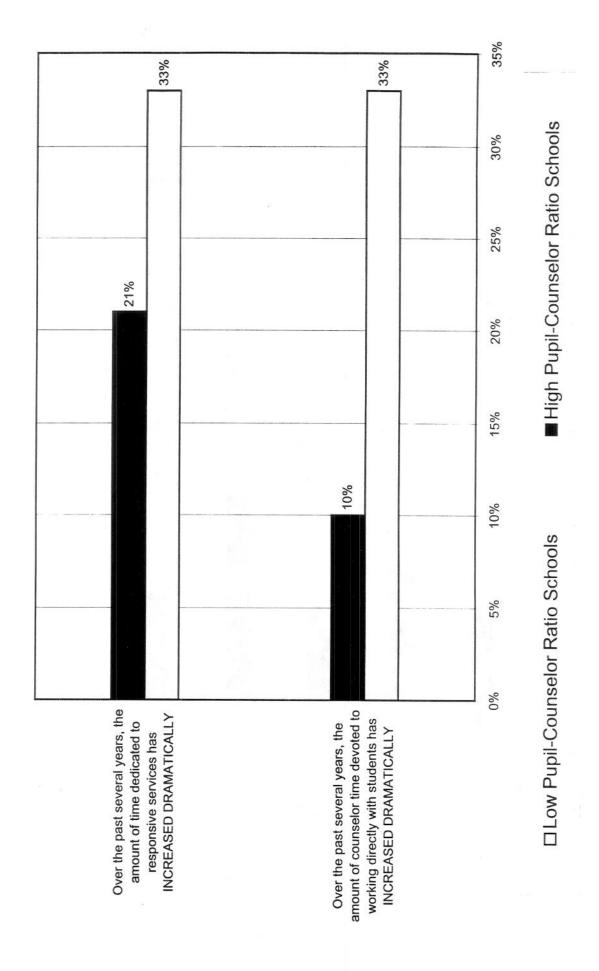
Students use their SEOP information/ portfolios during guidance activities other than the SEOP conference



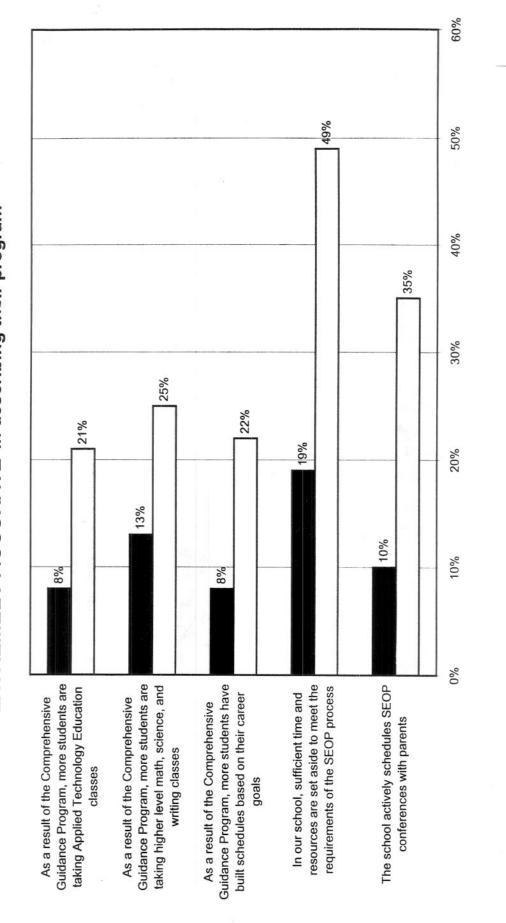
□ Low Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

■ High Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

GRAPH 2 -- Percentage of schools providing the following response



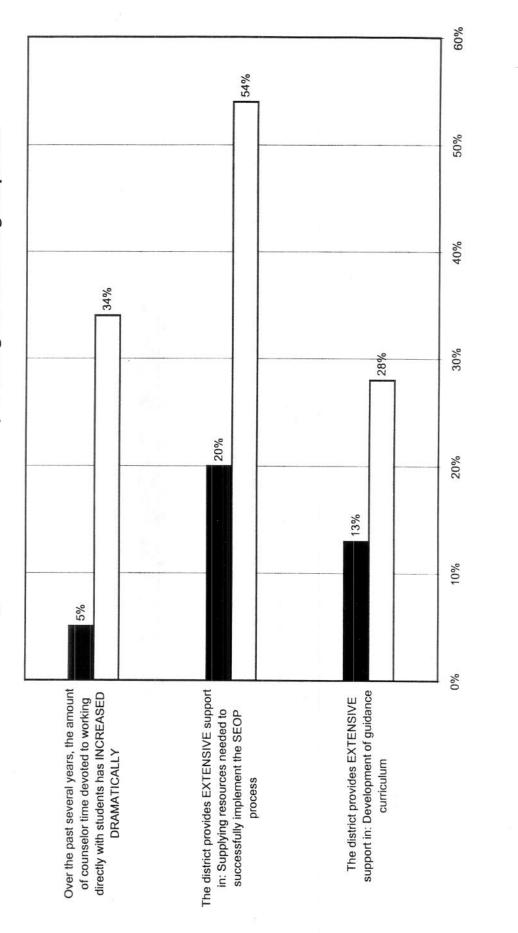
GRAPH 3 -- Percentage of Middle Schools responding that the statement is EXTREMELY ACCURATE in describing their program



☐ Low Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

■ High Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

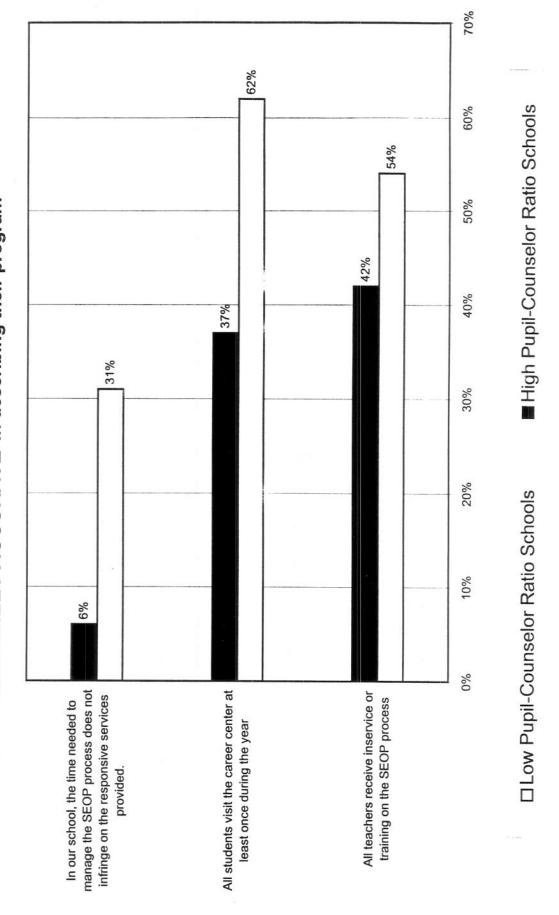
GRAPH 4 -- Percentage of Middle Schools providing the following response



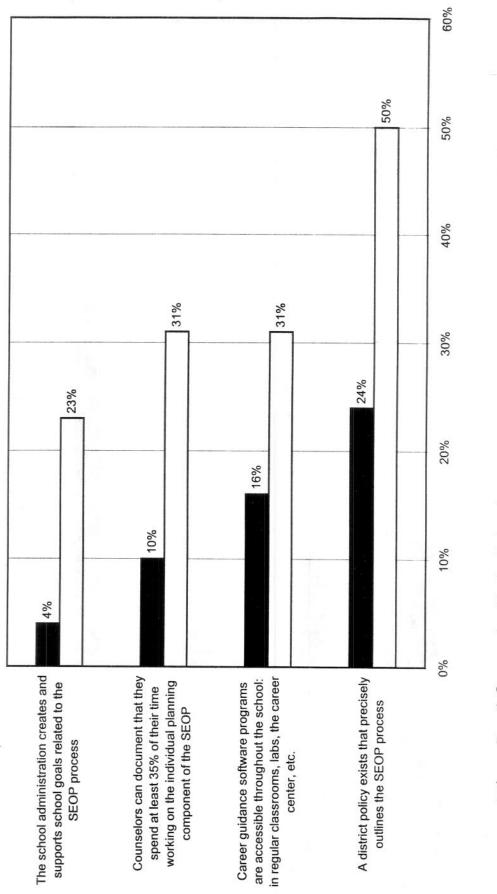
☐ Low Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

■ High Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

GRAPH 5 -- Percentage of High Schools responding that the statement is EXTREMELY ACCURATE in describing their program



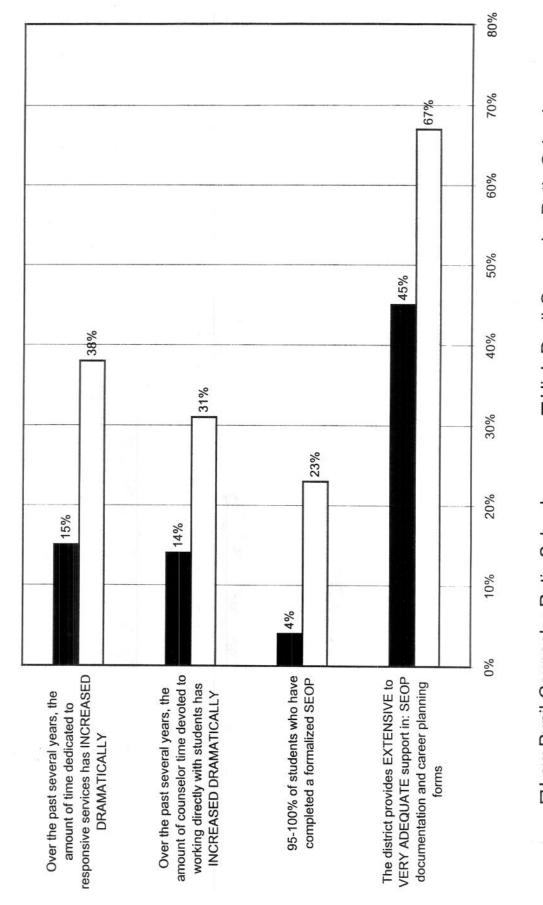
GRAPH 6 -- Percentage of High Schools responding that the statement is EXTREMELY or VERY ACCURATE in describing their program



☐ Low Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

■ High Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

GRAPH 7 -- Percentage of High Schools recording the following response



☐ Low Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

■ High Pupil-Counselor Ratio Schools

Appendix A

A Survey of Comprehensive Guidance Programs in Utah

Survey of Comprehensive Guidance Programs August 1999

Fairly accurate—

Extremely accurate—

8						
1.	A district policy exists that precisely outlines the SEOP process.	0	0	Ó	0	0
2.	SEOP conferences are conducted according to school and district policy.	0	0	0	0	0
3.	Teachers understand their roles in the SEOP process.	0	0	0	0	0
4.	All teachers receive inservice or training on the SEOP process.	0	0	0	0	0
5.	Teachers know about and have access to products which support the SEOP process (e.g., registration and goal setting forms).	0	0	0	0	0
6.	Teachers and counselors jointly plan guidance curriculum to make it relevant to ongoing activities in the classroom.	0	0	0	0	0
7.	Teachers receive an orientation to the career center.	0	0	0	0	0
8.	All students visit the career center at least once during the year.	0	0	0	0	0
9.	Career guidance software programs (e.g., CHOICES) are accessible throughout the school: in regular classrooms, labs, the career center, etc.	0	0	0	0	0
10.	The school actively schedules SEOP conferences with parents, making phone calls and scheduling night time conferences when necessary.	0	0	0	0	0
11.	Course offerings change in response to trends in students' SEOP goals.	0	0	0	0	0
12.	There is a mechanism in place in our school to assure that students' schedules are consistent with their career goals.	0	0	0	0	0
13.	Students frequently use the career center outside of regular classes.	0	0	0	0	0
14.	Students typically use their SEOP information/portfolios during guidance activities and meetings with advisors other than the SEOP conference.	0	0	0	0	0
15.	Students are exposed to a wide range of school-to-careers opportunities as part of the SEOP process.	0	0	0	0	0
16.	In our school, sufficient time and personnel are set aside to meet the requirements of the SEOP process.	0	0	0	0	0
17.	In our school, the time needed to manage the SEOP process does <u>not</u> infringe on the responsive services provided.	0	0	0	0	0
18.	Our counseling department receives sufficient funding to implement a highly successful Comprehensive Guidance Program.	0	0	0	0	0

Very accurate Not very accurate

	Fairly accurate—									
		Extremely accurate	\neg							
19.	Counselors can document that they spend a directly with students.	at least 80% of their time working	0	0	0	0				
20.	Counselors can document that they spend a the individual planning component of the SE		0	0	0	0	C			
As a 21. 22. 23. 24.	More students have built schedules based of More students are taking higher level math, More students have developed post-second More students are taking Applied Technology	ogram: on their career goals. science, and writing classes. lary education or training plans. gy Education classes.	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000			
25. 26. 27.	Organizes special faculty meetings on the S Requires inservice on the SEOP process. Creates and supports school goals related t Participates in an active role in the SEOP process.	to the SEOP process.	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000			
	Limited support ¬ Adequate support ¬ Extensive support ¬									
29. 30. 31. 32.	the extent of district-level support in the f Development of guidance curriculum SEOP documentation and career planning f Soliciting input about budget needs Accountability the district follows-up and e Comprehensive Guidance Program requirer Supplying resources needed to successfully	encourages schools to complete ments.	000 00	000 00	000 00	000 00	000			
34.	Record the percentage of students who have completed a formalized SEOP. 95-100% 90-94% 80-89% 70-79% Less than 70%	35. Record the percentage of stude high school schedule that is concareer goals and prepares them training and/ or a job. Less to	95- 90- 80- 70-	nt wit loost h 100% 94% 89% 79%	h the	eir schoo	ol			
36.	Over the past several years, the amount of counselor time devoted to working directly with students has Increased dramatically Output Increased steadily Increased slightly Remained the same Output Decreased	Increa Increa	the amount of time							

Appendix B

Survey Results

Survey of Comprehensive Guidance Programs August 1999

Not at all accurate—
Fairly accurate—
Extremely accurate—

1	. A district policy exists that precisely outlines the SEOP process.	47%	23%	20%	6%	5%
2	2. SEOP conferences are conducted according to school and district policy.	68%	22%	8%	3%	0%
3	s. Teachers understand their roles in the SEOP process.	19%	29%	37%	10%	5%
4	. All teachers receive inservice or training on the SEOP process.	34%	19%	24%	11%	10%
5	. Teachers know about and have access to products which support the SEOP process (e.g., registration and goal setting forms).	36%	27%	21%	10%	6%
6	. Teachers and counselors jointly plan guidance curriculum to make it relevant to ongoing activities in the classroom.	26%	28%	29%	14%	4%
7	. Teachers receive an orientation to the career center.	17%	13%	28%	17%	25%
8	. All students visit the career center at least once during the year.	10%	14%	18%	11%	17%
9	Career guidance software programs (e.g., CHOICES) are accessible throughout the school: in regular classrooms, labs, the career center, etc.	55%	22%	16%	5%	3%
10	. The school actively schedules SEOP conferences with parents, making phone calls and scheduling night time conferences when necessary.	78%	15%	5%	1%	1%
11	. Course offerings change in response to trends in students' SEOP goals.	30%	21%	27%	11%	11%
12	. There is a mechanism in place in our school to assure that students' schedules are consistent with their career goals.	27%	28%	25%	11%	9%
13	. Students frequently use the career center outside of regular classes.	1%	19%	30%	21%	19%
14.	Students typically use their SEOP information/portfolios during guidance activities and meetings with advisors other than the SEOP conference.	9%	19%	28%	20%	14%
15.	Students are exposed to a wide range of school-to-careers opportunities as part of the SEOP process.	86%	28%	28%	7%	2%
16.	In our school, sufficient time and personnel are set aside to meet the requirements of the SEOP process.	7%	20%	23%	4%	7%
17.	In our school, the time needed to manage the SEOP process does <u>not</u> infringe on the responsive services provided.	9%	21%	25%	19%	16%
18.	Our counseling department receives sufficient funding to implement a highly successful Comprehensive Guidance Program.	7%	33%	21%	11%	8%

		Fairl Extremely accurat	Not at a y accura		rate-			
19.	Counselors can document that they spendirectly with students.	nd at least 80% of their time working	62 % 25	% 11%	1%	2%		
20.	Counselors can document that they sper the individual planning component of the		61% 23	% 13%	2%	2%		
	result of the Comprehensive Guidance	I	270/ 20	0/ 000/	20/	20/		
	More students have built schedules base	9	27% 39					
	More students are taking higher level ma		28% 35	% 23%	9%	4%		
	More students have developed post-sec	= (1.) [[[[] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	34% 38	% 20%	4%	3%		
24.	More students are taking Applied Technology	ology Education classes. —————	25% 33	% 32%	6%	5%		
Tho (school administration:							
	Organizes special faculty meetings on th	e SEOP process	26% 15	% 24%	13%	23%		
	Requires inservice on the SEOP process		24% 19	% 22%	12%	24%		
	Creates and supports school goals relate		44% 30	% 16%	7%	3%		
	Participates in an active role in the SEOF		32% 26	% 21%	12%	8%		
29. 30. 31. 32.	the extent of district-level support in the Development of guidance curriculum SEOP documentation and career planning Soliciting input about budget needs—Accountability—the district follows-up and Comprehensive Guidance Program requisitions of the Supplying resources needed to successful.	ng forms ————————————————————————————————————	30% 25° 36% 21° 32% 16° 61% 17° 39% 19°	% 26% % 22% % 15%	7% 1 16% 1	10% 15% 5%		
34.	Record the percentage of students who have completed a formalized SEOP. 95-100%	35. Record the percentage of stude high school schedule that is concareer goals and prepares them training and/ or a job. Less:	nsistent w	ith their high so	r)		
36.	Over the past several years, the amount of counselor time devoted to working directly with students has	dedicated to responsive service	 Over the past several years, the amount of time dedicated to responsive services has Increased dramatically 7% 					
	Increased dramatically O	29% Increa	sed stead		22			
	Increased steadily O	53% Incre	ased sligh		10			
	Increased slightly	90/	ed the sa		15	%		

7%

28%

Decreased O

Remained the same O